

## Divine Wisdom

by Rev. Sharon Lee MacArthur

For Berkeley Chinese Community Church

August 19, 2018 • 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost • 11 am

### 1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14

<sup>10</sup> Then David slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the city of David. <sup>11</sup> The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned for seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem.

<sup>12</sup> So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.

<sup>3</sup> Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. <sup>4</sup> The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt-offerings on that altar. <sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' <sup>6</sup> And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. <sup>7</sup> And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?'

<sup>10</sup> It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup> God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup> I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. <sup>13</sup> I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. <sup>14</sup> If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.'

### Ephesians 5:15-20

<sup>15</sup> Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, <sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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What is wisdom?

The definitions are varied and many – it seems that everyone has something to say about wisdom...throughout the ages.



*Confucius in 500 BC said, to know what you know and know what you don't know – that is real wisdom.*



-*The Talmud which is the primary source of Jewish religious law and theology and its first edition was written about 139 in the Common Era, says, "The highest form of wisdom is kindness."*



- *Rumi, Persian poet and theologian and Sufi mystic of the 13th century said, "Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself."*



- *Jimi Hendrix, rock guitarist of the 20th century, said, "Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens."*



- *And Maya Angelou, American poet, singer, and civil rights activist of the 20th century, said, "The desire to reach for the stars is ambitious. The desire to reach hearts is wise."*

It seems to me that the what all of these quotable quotes have in common is a respect for others – relationship ...so I wondered if our scripture readings for today might lead us there...



Let's start with the Kings passage – it's about Solomon...Israel's famous king, Solomon, who is remembered for his wisdom. We might remember the story much later in his reign when his wisdom led him to order a child to be cut in half so that each of the two women who claimed to be the mother of the child could share the child. Of course, the real mother came forward and sacrificed her half to the other mother so that the child could live. Solomon gave the child to the real mother. The Wisdom of Solomon....this was the gift God gave him after he asked - not for riches or wealth or long life - but for help with governing the people wisely and well. Of course, God was so pleased with his request that Solomon got the wisdom he asked and AND all the other things, too.

Solomon in today's story was a young man – remember he said, "I am only a child"—According to the Oxford annotated Bible he was probably about 20 years old. So he must have felt overwhelmed by his sudden power...he must have been worried about the heavy duty responsibilities that came with the power. So this sudden success gave him pause rather than rushing to rejoicing and celebrating.



Remember - his father David, was the greatest of Israel's kings –how would you like to try to fill those shoes? AND – David had placed him – Solomon - on the throne rather than his brother Adonijah, who was the "rightful" heir.

AND a number of enemies had to be eliminated (euphemism for “killed” to establish Solomon as king, and ultimately, a peaceful kingdom. Today's passage is a golden moment in the midst of an otherwise bloody and narrative of infidelity, violence, and sin. The path to the throne wasn't pretty for Solomon, and as many have observed, it was far from Israel's finest moment.

Old Testament scholar, Tremper Longman, III, focuses on the good part of Solomon's reign and the way he fulfilled God's will in building up the kingdom of Israel, including the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. He notes that Solomon's very name "is a tribute to David's kingdom work" because its root, *shalom*, evokes the era of peace that followed his becoming king. (*The Lectionary Commentary: OT and Acts*).



A time of peace made it possible to build the temple for which Solomon is famous. Isn't it interesting that as great and even glorious as David was, he was not the one God appointed to build this most important and sacred of structures.



WISDOM

Longman then talks about the nature of wisdom, the gift that Solomon requested. Maybe we, like Longman, can guess that even as young as Solomon is, he showed that he already had a bit of wisdom even before he asked for it because that's what he asked for!



Parker Palmer, in his book, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, speaks of the "heart" as holding something more than just our feelings. So, maybe what he's saying is that the heart is where wisdom lives. Maybe wisdom needs intelligence and marries it with feeling, intuition, sensory input, and experience. Maybe Solomon was asking for a healed heart full of wisdom. Maybe he had a heart that needed to be healed of the violence that had preceded his accession to the throne.

Wisdom, Longman writes, is about *relationship*, which we see in Solomon's close, even "intimate relationship" with God. Isn't it intimate that God *talks* with Solomon in his dreams? Maybe **because** it's relational, Longman says that biblical wisdom...divine wisdom is also an ethical and emotional category, much like "emotional intelligence" rather than IQ."

Solomon's wisdom was great in many ways...and there is a "but" - Solomon's wisdom was great except when it came to women or his loyalty to God. what' lacking is the ethical component...an emotional intelligence.



How could this great king who had spoken with God go on to worship false gods? You see, Solomon's weakness for foreign women seduced him into worshiping the gods of his women. How ironic that the one who built the glorious temple for God – for Jehovah winds up worshiping other gods....and in the end, Solomon is not really a model of DIVINE Wisdom. He did not live the life that God asked of him – remember?

<sup>14</sup>If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments...



What a perfect segue to our New Testament reading –from Ephesians 5:

<sup>15</sup>“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,”

and here are the specifics for living as a wise person....

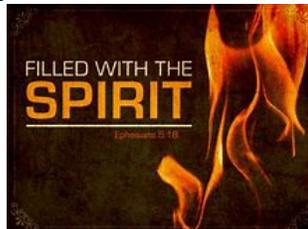
- make the most of the time you have



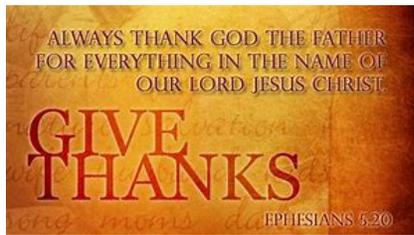
- Don't be foolish, - understand what the will of the Lord is.



- Don't fill yourself with earthly stuff be filled with the Spirit,



- singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts and giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything!



That's the divine wisdom! The model for that? Jesus Christ!  
The ultimate relationship builder – for whom the all the commandments boil down to relationships – loving God with all that we have, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.



Imagine that – following Jesus – brings with it wisdom – how's that for a bonus?



So I have a couple of stories –  
You might have heard this one...



The setting is a faculty meeting at a seminary.



An angel pops in and announces to the dean, "Sir, the Lord recognizes your unselfish and exemplary behavior and wants to reward you with your choice of infinite wealth, wisdom or beauty."

Without hesitating, the dean says, "infinite wisdom."

"Done!" says the angel, and disappears in a cloud of smoke and a bolt of lightning.

All heads turn toward the dean, who is sitting surrounded by a faint halo of light.

After a long pause, one of his colleagues whispers, "Say something."

The dean looks at them and says, "I should have taken the money!"

Hmmm - did his new infinite wisdom give him that insight?



And this story is more in keeping with the wisdom one attains following Jesus even though the title is Birthday Party for a Prostitute.



It is said that this was one of the most extraordinary birthday parties ever held.



- It was not in a plush ballroom of a grand hotel.
- There were no famous celebrities present
- No one there was rich or powerful.
- It was held at 3 am in a small seedy cafe in Honolulu.
- The guest of honor was a prostitute,
- the fellow guests were prostitutes,
- and the man who threw it was a Christian minister!

The idea came to Christian minister Tony Campolo early one morning as he sat in the cafe. He was drinking coffee at the counter when a group of prostitutes walked in and took up the stools around him. One of the girls, Agnes, lamented that not only was it her birthday tomorrow but that she'd never had a birthday party.

Tony thought it would be a great idea to surprise Agnes with a birthday party. He found out from the cafe owner Harry that the girls came in every morning around 3.30am Tony and Harry agreed to set the place up for a party. Word somehow got out on the street, so that by 3.15 the next morning the place was packed with prostitutes, the cafe owner and his wife, and Pastor Tony.

When Agnes walked in - she was surprised by the streamers and balloons and Harry holding a birthday cake, and everyone screaming out "Happy Birthday!" Agnes was overwhelmed.

The tears poured down her face as the crowd sang Happy Birthday. When Harry called on her to cut the cake she paused. She'd never had a birthday cake and wondered if she could take it home to show her mother. When Agnes left there was a stunned silence. Tony did what a Christian minister should. He led Harry, Harry's wife and a roomful of prostitutes in a prayer for Agnes.

It was a birthday party rarely seen in Honolulu – thrown by a Christian minister for a 39 year old prostitute who had never had anyone go out of their way to do something like this and who expected nothing in return.

This was such a surprising turn of events that Harry the cafe owner found it hard to believe there were churches that would do this sort of thing, but if there were then that's the sort of church he would be prepared to join.



And he did! Another heart healed for wisdom to fill it...another one to follow Jesus! Hallelujah & Amen!